

HOUSE BILL No. 1557

DIGEST OF INTRODUCED BILL

Citations Affected: IC 10-17.

Synopsis: Department of veterans affairs. Requires the department of veterans' affairs (department) to employ staff for purposes of: (1) assisting veterans who are incarcerated; (2) seeking endowment benefits and grants; and (3) coordinating with other agencies and universities on behalf of veterans. Requires all counties to designate and employ a county service officer. Requires the department to establish six regional offices. Provides funding for county service officers. Makes an annual appropriation.

Effective: July 1, 2015.

Judy

January 20, 2015, read first time and referred to Committee on Veterans Affairs and Public Safety.



First Regular Session of the 119th General Assembly (2015)

PRINTING CODE. Amendments: Whenever an existing statute (or a section of the Indiana Constitution) is being amended, the text of the existing provision will appear in this style type, additions will appear in **this style type**, and deletions will appear in ~~this style type~~.

Additions: Whenever a new statutory provision is being enacted (or a new constitutional provision adopted), the text of the new provision will appear in **this style type**. Also, the word **NEW** will appear in that style type in the introductory clause of each SECTION that adds a new provision to the Indiana Code or the Indiana Constitution.

Conflict reconciliation: Text in a statute in *this style type* or ~~this style type~~ reconciles conflicts between statutes enacted by the 2014 Regular Session and 2014 Second Regular Technical Session of the General Assembly.

HOUSE BILL No. 1557

A BILL FOR AN ACT to amend the Indiana Code concerning military and veterans and to make an appropriation.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Indiana:

- 1 SECTION 1. IC 10-17-1-6.5 IS ADDED TO THE INDIANA CODE
2 AS A **NEW** SECTION TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY
3 1, 2015]: **Sec. 6.5. (a) The department shall employ a service officer,**
4 **under the direction and supervision of the director, to work**
5 **cooperatively with the department of corrections, civil courts, and**
6 **criminal courts to assist incarcerated veterans with criminal and**
7 **civil matters and in the transition from imprisonment to the**
8 **community.**
9 **(b) The department shall employ a grants and endowment**
10 **specialist, under the direction and supervision of the director, to**
11 **assist veterans in locating and obtaining federal and state benefits.**
12 **The grants and endowment specialist shall coordinate with other**
13 **agencies and universities to carry out the duties, purpose, and**
14 **functions of this chapter.**
15 **(c) The department shall fix the qualifications, duties, and**



compensation of the employees described in subsections (a) and (b) as it may require to implement this section.

SECTION 2. IC 10-17-1-9, AS AMENDED BY P.L.105-2014, SECTION 1, IS AMENDED TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2015]: Sec. 9. (a) A county executive:

(1) shall designate and ~~may~~:

~~(A) appoint a county service officer for a four (4) year term; or~~

~~(B) employ a county service officer; and~~

(2) may employ service officer assistants;

to serve the veterans of the county.

(b) The fiscal body of a city may provide for the employment by the mayor of a city service officer and service officer assistants to serve the veterans of the city.

(c) If the remuneration and expenses of a county or city service officer are paid from the funds of the county or city employing the service officer, the service officer shall:

(1) have the same qualifications and be subject to the same rules as the director, assistant director, and state service officers of the Indiana department of veterans' affairs; and

(2) serve under the supervision of the director of veterans' affairs.

A service officer assistant must have the same qualifications as an employee described in section 11(b) of this chapter. A rule contrary to this subsection is void.

(d) County and city fiscal bodies may appropriate funds necessary for the purposes described in this section.

SECTION 3. IC 10-17-1-10, AS AMENDED BY P.L.169-2013, SECTION 3, IS AMENDED TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2015]: Sec. 10. (a) Within thirty (30) days of their appointment, new county or city service officers must attend a new service officer orientation presented by the Indiana department of veterans' affairs and, according to the standards established under section 4(4) of this chapter, become certified to assist veterans and their dependents and survivors. The curriculum for the new service officer orientation presented under this subsection shall be determined by the director.

(b) Within one (1) year of appointment, new service officers must attend a course presented by a national organization and become accredited to represent veterans.

(c) An individual employed as a county or city service officer under this chapter on July 1, 2013, is required to become accredited not later than July 1, 2015, to represent veterans.

(d) Annually, all county or city service officers shall undergo a



1 course of training to adequately address problems of discharged
 2 veterans in the service officer's county or city, including a thorough
 3 familiarization with laws, rules, and regulations of the federal
 4 government and the state that affect benefits to which the veterans and
 5 dependents of the veterans are entitled. After a service officer has
 6 undergone this sustainment training and successfully passed a written
 7 test, the service officer shall be recertified by the director to assist
 8 veterans for the following year.

9 **(e) There is annually appropriated to the department of**
 10 **veterans' affairs from the state general fund, to be distributed to**
 11 **each county, an amount sufficient to provide grants to counties to**
 12 **pay salaries of accredited service officers. The amounts distributed**
 13 **to counties under this section must be based on the number of**
 14 **veterans residing in the county according to the last preceding**
 15 **United States decennial census. The department shall determine**
 16 **the amount of each grant that is awarded under this subsection.**

17 **(f) There is annually appropriated to the department of**
 18 **veterans' affairs from the state general fund an amount sufficient**
 19 **to provide grants to pay for accreditation, certification, and**
 20 **recertification of service officers. The department shall determine**
 21 **the amount of each grant that is awarded under this subsection.**

22 **(g) The department shall adopt rules under IC 4-22-2 to**
 23 **implement subsections (e) and (f).**

24 SECTION 4. IC 10-17-1-11, AS ADDED BY P.L.144-2007,
 25 SECTION 10, IS AMENDED TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE
 26 JULY 1, 2015]: Sec. 11. (a) The following employees of the Indiana
 27 department of veterans' affairs must satisfy the requirements set forth
 28 in section 5(a) of this chapter:

- 29 (1) State service officers.
- 30 (2) Director of the state approving agency.
- 31 (3) Program directors of the state approving agency.
- 32 (4) Director of the Indiana state veterans' cemetery established by
- 33 IC 10-17-11-4.

34 **(5) Grants and endowment specialists.**

35 (b) An employee of the Indiana department of veterans' affairs not
 36 described in subsection (a) must:

- 37 (1) satisfy; or
- 38 (2) be the spouse, surviving spouse, parent, or child of a person
- 39 who satisfies;

40 the requirements set forth in section 5(a) of this chapter.

41 SECTION 5. IC 10-17-15 IS ADDED TO THE INDIANA CODE
 42 AS A NEW CHAPTER TO READ AS FOLLOWS [EFFECTIVE



JULY 1, 2015]:

Chapter 15. Regional Veterans' Affairs Offices

Sec. 1. The department shall establish six (6) regional veterans' affairs offices in the state.

Sec. 2. There is annually appropriated to the department a sufficient amount from the state general fund to establish and operate six (6) regional veterans' affairs offices located outside of Marion County in the following geographic areas of Indiana:

(1) Northwest.

(2) Northeast.

(3) East central.

(4) West central.

(5) Southeast.

(6) Southwest.

Sec. 3. Regional veterans' affairs offices established under this chapter shall offer the following services:

(1) Assistance to veterans with obtaining the following:

(A) Federal and state veteran benefits.

(B) Legal assistance.

(2) Support to veterans' courts (as defined in IC 33-23-16-10).

Sec. 4. Each regional veterans' affairs office established under this chapter must be staffed at a level that reasonably permits a veteran to receive assistance during ordinary business hours.

Sec. 5. The department shall adopt rules under IC 4-22-2 to implement this chapter.

